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Founding of the Christian Church, 30-100 A. D.

IN FIFTY STUDIES.

PREPARED BY CLYDE W. VOTAW, CHICAGO, ILLS.

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SECOND DIVISION.

PERIOD OF GOSPEL EXPANSION.

Time: Seventeen Years, 35-52 A. D. Leaders: Peter, James and Paul. Material: Acts 8: 1—15: 35.

CHARACTERIZATION.—During the first five years of the Church, the thousands of converts who joined the original body of Christians in Jerusalem were Jews either by descent or by adoption. But the preaching of Stephen brought on a murderous persecution of the Christians, in consequence of which they were dispersed throughout Palestine and Syria. Everywhere they at once began to evangelize the communities into which they came. By this means it was no long time until all classes, both of Jews and of Gentiles, were seeking admission to the Christian Churches. Naturally the question arose: must the Gentiles become Jews (i. e., conform to the Jewish ritual, particularly the rite of circumcision) before they could become Christians? or, in other words, was Christianity the religion of a Jewish sect or a universal, spiritual religion for all men and all time? The latter was the conception of the Gospel as Christ presented it, but much courage, wisdom and strength were needed to affect its realization. The pressure toward this catholicity came upon the Church through three distinct avenues of experience: (1) Peter's divine vision, by which he was led to receive Cornelius and his family, who were pure Gentiles, as such into the Christian Church; (2) the efforts of the Gospel missionaries in Antioch, where the same policy of Gentile admission was adopted; (3) Paul's first evangelizing tour through Asia Minor, where he found it his Christian duty to admit the Gentiles to the Church on the same plane with the Jews. In view of these practical experiences, therefore, the Gospel idea underwent a rapid and significant expansion during these seventeen years. Antioch became the Gentile mother-church, and represented the universal conception of Christianity. The mother-church at Jerusalem was still Jewish in composition and temper, but it had recognized the divine leading of Peter in the case of Cornelius, and was disposed toward an official consideration of the question. The leaders of the Church therefore met in Jerusalem, treated the problem in a general conference, and formally recognized the Gospel to be a universal religion, to which the Gentiles had an equal right with the Jews. The characteristics of this Period were, then, the extension of the Christian Church through Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor; the preparation of men, such as Paul and Barnabas, who were fit to lead in this work; and the agitation, discussion and settlement of this Gentile problem, which determined the scope of Christianity. But time was required for putting this doctrine into practical effect, and for making the adjustments necessary in view of it. This was to be the achievement of the subsequent Period III.

SYNOPSIS.—Violent persecution of the Church. Paul prominent. The Christians forced to leave Jerusalem. They disperse themselves throughout Palestine and Syria. Consequent spread of organized Christianity. Attitude of the Jerusalem Church toward Gospel work in Samaria. Preparation for a larger conception of the Gospel. Induction of Paul into his appointed office. His early efforts for Christianity. Peter's missionary tour through Palestine. Divine light on the Gentile problem in the case of Peter and Cornelius. Preliminary consideration of the problem by the Jerusalem Church. Acquiescence in the new departure. Evangelization of Cilicia by Paul. Rise of the Gentile mother-church at Antioch. Paul summoned thither. Martyrdom of James the Apostle. Miraculous deliverance of Peter. Paul's first evangelizing tour in Asia Minor. His ascendancy over Barnabas. Paul's preaching. Churches established. Agitation, in Antioch, of the Gentile problem. A general conference of the Christian leaders determined upon. Proceedings of the Conference at Jerusalem. Satisfactory solution of the problem. The universal, spiritual Gospel sanctioned. The ground of harmony fixed. The work of evangelization divided ethnographically between the original Apostles and Paul.

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SEC. 10. FIRST EXTENSION OF ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY BEYOND JERUSALEM.

Acts 8:1-40.

35 A. D.

SAMARIA AND ELSEWHERE.

NOTE.—The material intended exclusively for advanced students will in this and succeeding Studies be enclosed in brackets [], instead of being printed in italics, as in the Studies of the first Division.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.—(1) Cambridge Bible on Acts, pp. 95-108; (2) Gloag's Comty. on Acts, I: 270-312. (3) Meyer's Comty. on Acts, pp. 164-180. (4) Expositor's Bible on Acts, I: 346-419. [(5) Neander's Planting and Training of the Christian Church, I: 57-66.] (6) Bible Dictionary, arts. Ethiopia, Evangelist, Philip, Samaria, Samaritans, Simon Magus, Sorcery. [(7) Vaughan's Church of the First Days, pp. 157-188.] [(8) Conybeare and Howson's Life of Paul, pp. 63-66.] [(9) Peloubet's Notes, 1892, in loc.] [(10) S. S. Times, Mar. 17 and 24, 1883.]

FIRST STEP: FACTS.

PARAGRAPH 1. *v.* 1a, Saul approves the execution of Stephen. *v.* 1b, violent persecution of the Church. *v.* 1c, Christians dispersed throughout Palestine. *v.* 2, Stephen buried and lamented. *v.* 3, Saul the chief inquisitor. *Vv.* 1-3, VIOLENT PERSECUTION AND GENERAL DISPERSION OF THE CHRISTIANS.

PAR. 2. *v.* 4, the Christians as missionaries. *v.* 5, Philip preaches in Samaria. *v.* 6, general acceptance of the Gospel. *v.* 7, testimony of miraculous cures. *v.* 8, rejoicing in the Gospel. *Vv.* 4-8, PHILIP'S MINISTRY IN SAMARIA.

PAR. 3. *v.* 9, Simon the sorcerer. *v.* 10, his prestige in Samaria. *v.* 11, his achievements. *v.* 12, the people become Christian converts, *v.* 13, Simon among them. *Vv.* 9-13, OSTENSIBLE CONVERSION OF SIMON MAGUS.

PAR. 4. *v.* 14a, word of Philip's success reaches Jerusalem. *v.* 14b, Peter and John sent to advise and assist Philip. *vv.* 15f, prayer for spirit baptism, not yet received. *v.* 17, now received in the imposition of hands. *vv.* 18f, Simon's wish to purchase this power. *vv.* 20f, Peter rebukes his sinful presumption, *vv.* 22f, and bids him pray for forgiveness. *v.* 24, Simon begs Peter's intercession. *v.* 25, apostles return to Jerusalem, preaching by the way. *Vv.* 14-25, WORK OF THE APOSTOLIC DEPUTATION IN SAMARIA.

PAR. 5. *v.* 26, Philip inspired to journey towards Gaza. *v.* 27, meets a devout Ethiopian official, *v.* 28, engaged in reading Isaiah. *v.* 29, Philip prompted to approach him. *v.* 30, questions him concerning the Scripture. *v.* 31, Philip invited to give an exposition of the text. *vv.* 32f, the prophetic description of the humiliation and death of the Messiah. *v.* 34, the Ethiopian inquires as to the reference of this prophecy. *v.* 35, Philip preaches its fulfillment in Jesus. *vv.* 36ff, Ethiopian converted and baptized. *v.* 39a, Philip's withdrawal. *v.* 39b, joy of the new convert. *v.* 40, Philip's evangelizing journey from Azotus to Cæsarea. *Vv.* 26-40, PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL.

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SECOND STEP: EXPLANATIONS.

PARAGRAPH 1. *v.* 1, [(a) does the first clause belong here, or at end of ch. 7, and why?] (b) "arose . . . day"—comp. AV, is this to be taken exactly, or as a general note of time, cf. Jno. 14:20; 16:23, 26. (c) give a brief description of the Jerusalem church. (d) state reasons for this reign of terror. (e) "all scattered"—literally or hyperbolically, cf. Matt. 3:5; Mk. 1:33; et al. (f) cf. Jno. 10:13. (g) "regions"—cf. Acts 1:8; 11:19-21. *v.* 2, "devout men"—Christians, or unavowed sympathizers, cf. Jno. 19:38-42. *v.* 3, [(a) "laid waste"—comp. AV.] (b) "haling"—meaning, cf. same Greek word in Acts 14:19; 17:6; [why did not the Revisers give a modern English word?] (c) "women"—cf. Acts 9:2; 22:4, noting their prominence in the Christian community. (d) "committed"—for what purpose?

PAR. 2. *v.* 4, (a) "therefore"—connection? (b) "went about"—comp. AV. (c) "preaching the word"—in what did this consist? (d) a particular instance of this preaching subjoined. *v.* 5, (a) "Philip"—recall all previously learned about him, cf. Acts 6:5, et al. [(b) "city of Samaria"—was this the city by that name?] (c) "proclaimed . . . Christ"—cf. Matt. 3:1; 4:17. (d) were the Samaritans expecting a Messiah, cf. Jno. 4:25? *v.* 6, (a) "multitudes"—cf. Jno. 4:35, 42. (b) "gave heed"—meaning? (c) "heard"—what, the preaching, or accounts of the signs? (d) "signs"—what were they? (e) why worked? *v.* 7, why was Philip, not an apostle, given the power to work miracles, cf. Acts 6:8. *v.* 8, "much joy"—what reason for it?

PAR. 3. *v.* 9, [(a) "Simon"—often called Magus, why?] (b) "beforetime"—when? (c) "amazed"—cf. AV. (d) in what city? (e) "giving out . . . great one"—just what did Simon claim for himself? *v.* 10, (a) "all gave heed"—why, and to what extent? (b) "this man . . . Great"—cf. AV, and explain the change. [(c) is an incarnation or emanation from God meant, or only the possession of superhuman power?] *v.* 11, "because"—long established prestige. *v.* 12, (a) "good tidings"—cf. AV. [(b) "kingdom of God"—is this a new element introduced into the Gospel preaching, cf. Acts 1:3, and explain significance.] *v.* 13, (a) "Simon . . . believed"—in what, and why? (b) why was he baptized? (c) meaning of "continued with Philip"? (d) "he was amazed"—as people had been amazed at his sorcery?

PAR. 4. *v.* 14, (a) "the apostles"—all twelve, together constituting the official body of the Church? (b) why were they at Jerusalem? [(c) was communication maintained between the home church and the scattered Christians?] *v.* 15f, "prayed for them"—whom? *v.* 17, (a) "laid . . . hands"—is this the same rite as that mentioned in Acts 6:6 q. v.? (b) describe and explain the rite. *v.* 18f, (a) did Simon receive the Spirit baptism? (b) what besides that did he wish? *v.* 20, was this an imprecation, or only an expression of abhorrence? *v.* 21, [(a) "part . . . this matter"—in the gift of the Holy Spirit, or in the Gospel in general?] (b) what was wrong in Simon's attitude? *v.* 22, (a) does Peter think forgiveness improbable in Simon's case? [(b) "pray the Lord"—cf. AV, is Christ referred to here; if so, why?] (c) "thought . . . heart"—explain the full meaning. *v.* 23, [explain these two similes, and their application to Simon's condition, cf. Deut. 29:18; Heb. 12:15; Isa. 58:6.] *v.* 24, (a) why did Simon request the Apostles to pray for him? (b) cf. Num. 21:7. (c) was Simon's attitude here one of sincere penitence? *v.* 25, (a) "testified"—to the Gospel, or to Philip's work and worth? (b) "preached . . . villages"—what does this show

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as regards their activity, and their attitude toward the Samaritans? [(c) why have we no account of their report to the Jerusalem church, and its effect?]

PAR. 5. v. 26, (a) "angel . . . spake"—to be understood literally or figuratively? (b) where did Philip receive the message? (c) "toward . . . south"—notice marg. *rdg.* (d) locate Gaza on map, and describe it. (e) "desert"—one of the two roads to Gaza thus designated. v. 27, (a) "went"—implicit obedience. (b) "Ethiopia"—locate on map, and describe. (c) "great authority"—royal treasurer? (d) "Candace"—title of a line of queens? (e) "Jerusalem . . . to worship"—as a true Jew, or as a devout proselyte? v. 28, (a) "reading"—oriental custom? (b) was he studying up the Messianic prophecies because he had heard in Jerusalem of Jesus and his claims? [(c) why was he reading Isaiah?] [(d) had he the original Hebrew, or the Septuagint translation?] v. 29, (a) "Spirit said"—not an angel this time? (b) was the word a divine impulse? (c) "join thyself"—in what way? v. 30, (a) "heard"—audible reading customary? (b) mark the skill of Philip's approach. v. 31, (a) consider the modesty of the Ethiopian. (b) cf. Jno. 16:13. (c) note the invitation and its significance. vv. 32f, (a) cf. Isa. 53:7f, according to the Septuagint. (b) criticise this statement of the two verses: he submitted meekly to abuse and injustice until they culminated in his death, and no one cared that he was gone. [(c) make a paraphrase giving exact meaning.] v. 34, (a) consider the meaning, fairness and significance of this question. [(b) what different views are held regarding it, according to your judgment which is the best, and why?] v. 35, "preached . . . Jesus"—as Jesus had himself done for the apostles, cf. Lk. 24:23ff. v. 36, (a) "certain water"—is it known where? [(b) was the Ethiopian qualified for baptism?] v. 37, explain the omission of this verse from RV. v. 38, [(a) what mode of baptism used?] (b) what were the meaning and scope of this baptism by Philip? v. 39, (a) "caught away"—a miraculous removal, or a hasty departure under divine impulse? (b) "rejoicing"—why, cf. Acts 16:34. v. 40, (a) "was found"—is a miracle implied? (b) "Azotus"—locate and describe. (c) "preached . . . cities"—a missionary tour? (d) "Cæsarea"—cf. Acts 21:8.

THIRD STEP: TOPICS.

1. **The Great Persecution and Dispersion.** [(1) consider the former recorded persecutions of the Christian Church, stating the circumstances, causes, leaders, results of trials, and final outcome of the persecutions.] (2) explain why Pharisees, Sadducees and common people were now united in hostility toward the Christians. [(3) describe the career of Stephen, showing how this was the occasion of their hatred and violence.] (4) how thorough did they intend this persecution to be? (5) whither, and to what extent, were the Jerusalem Christians dispersed? (6) how came it that the apostles were allowed to remain in Jerusalem? (7) why did they wish to do so? (8) to what extent did the Jerusalem Church remain thus scattered? (9) consider the Providential aspect of this persecution and dispersion.

2. **Saul as Chief Inquisitor.** (1) recall all that has been previously ascertained concerning him. (2) what was the reason for and significance of the part he took in Stephen's death? [(3) exact meaning of "consenting" in Acts 8:1, cf. also Acts 22:20.] [(4) exact meaning of "gave my vote against them" in Acts 26:10.] (5) consider his own description of his persecution of the Christians, Acts 22:4, 19f; 26:9ff; Gal. 1:13. (6) was he sincere in his persecution, cf. Acts 26:9; 1 Tim. 1:13? (7) what was his purpose, cf. Gal.

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1:14, Jno. 16:2? (8) how did he justify his action, cf. Deut. 13:6-10; 17:2-7; Lev. 24:10-16; (9) give a careful statement concerning Saul's religious position at this time, as regards both belief and practice. [(10) is it to be supposed that he had at this time any misgivings about the righteousness of his persecution?] [(11) consider the history of religious persecution in the Christian Church, justifying if possible, if not, then accounting for, its presence.]

3. The Office of Evangelist. (1) see the reference to this office in Eph. 4:11. (2) was it properly an order, or a function? (3) what were the characteristics of the evangelist and his work? [(4) compare it with the work of the apostle on the one hand and that of the pastor on the other.] (5) is it probable that the office arose in the exigencies of this great dispersion? (6) is this Philip of ch. 8 the apostle, or the deacon? [(7) why was the persecution directed against Stephen and his colleagues rather than against the Church as such?] (8) consider Philip's itinerant preaching, Acts 8:5, 40. (9) observe that he is called an evangelist, Acts 21:8. [(10) what is the particular sphere of the evangelist to-day?] [(11) is it desirable to perpetuate the order; if so, to what extent, and under what limitations?]

4. Samaria and the Samaritans. (1) locate Samaria on the map, with its chief cities, stating its general dimensions and geographical features. (2) give a description of the work done by Jesus and his disciples in Samaria, cf. Jno. 4:1-42; Lk. 9:51-56; 17:11-19; et al. [(3) consider carefully the rise of the Samaritans, cf. 2 Kgs. 17:1-41; Josephus's Ant. 10:9:7; 9:14:3.] [(4) consider their relations to the Judean Jews after the Babylonian Exile, cf. Ezra 4:1-24; Nehemiah passim.] [(5) how largely Jewish were the Samaritans in Christ's time?] (6) what was their relation to the Judean Jews, cf. Jno. 4:9; 8:48; Josephus's Ant. 20:6:1; 9:14:3. (7) what portion of the Old Testament Scriptures did they adhere to, and why? (8) what were the characteristics and peculiarities of their religious belief and practice? (9) were they better prepared to receive the Gospel than were the strict Jews; if so, why?

5. Simon the Sorcerer. (1) compare carefully the similar incident narrated in Acts 13:6-12. (2) what was Simon's position in Samaria, how attained, the popular estimate of him, and reason therefor? [(3) what is the origin and meaning of the term "sorcery"?] (4) in what did the sorcery of that time consist? (5) why did it just then have such a great influence over the people (see Neander)? [(6) compare with it present day sorcery and its influence.] (7) what was the relation of Philip's miracles to the general acceptance of the Gospel by the Samaritans (cf. Ex. 7:8-8:19, the contest before Pharaoh between Moses and the Egyptian magicians)? (8) what was the ground for, and the character of, Simon's conversion? (9) exactly what constituted Simon's sin? [(10) compare 2 Kgs. 5:1-27.] (11) compare his sin with that of Ananias, showing how it was relatively harmless and pardonable. (12) may we regard Simon as having become a true Christian? [(13) what is the tradition concerning him, and of what value is it?] (14) what is the meaning of the term "simony" (derived from this incident) as used regarding ecclesiastical affairs? [(15) tell something about the character and prevalence of simony in the history of the Christian Church.]

6. The Apostolic Deputation—Another Step toward a Universal Gospel. (1) what especial interest and significance would the report of Philip's success in Samaria have for the Jerusalem Church? (2) what was the purpose of the

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apostles in sending representatives thither : (a) because through the national distrust of the Samaritans, the report was doubted ; (b) lack of confidence in Philip's ability to do the work well ; (c) jealousy of the success which the Hellenist Philip was having ; (d) to extend fellowship to the new converts, and affiliate them with the Jerusalem Church ; (e) to bestow the special gifts of the Spirit. [(3) why were Peter and John chosen for the mission, cf. Lk. 9:54 ; Acts 3:1 ; et al. ?] (4) what did they do on arrival ? [(5) was their presence and function necessary for the establishment of a Christian Church in Samaria ?] (6) what was the attitude, in view of this visit, of the apostles and the Jerusalem Church, toward the Samaritan Christians ? (7) how had they been partially prepared for this advance by the preaching of Stephen ? (8) consider this evangelizing of Samaria as a natural step in the universalizing of the Gospel, thus : Judean Jews, then Hellenists, then Samaritans, then entire Gentiles.

7. Holy Spirit Baptism. (1) what were the limits and peculiarities of baptism as administered by Philip ? (2) was it sufficient to constitute his converts Christians and a Christian Church ? (3) why was a further apostolic baptism necessary ? [(4) did all of the Samaritan converts receive the second baptism ?] (5) In what did the Holy Spirit baptism consist : (a) the impartation of the sanctifying influences of the Spirit ; (b) miraculous gifts, as at Pentecost, tongue-speaking, prophecy, etc. (6) could others than apostles transmit these gifts, cf. Acts 9:17 ; 10:44 ? (7) what was the manner of transmission ? [(8) describe the distinction between the Philippine and the apostolic baptism, and compare with it the distinction between the Johannine and the Christian baptism (cf. Acts 19:1-7).] [(9) did this special spirit baptism cease with the Primitive Church ?]

8. Conversion of the Ethiopian Official. (1) describe this Ethiopian as to his character, official position, and the circumstances of this narrative. (2) explain his interest in the Messianic prophecy, and Philip's ministry to him. [(3) is there anything known of his life after conversion ?] (4) was he a Jew or a Gentile ? [(5) why were so much space and attention given to this incident ?] (6) how is it connected with the development of the universal Gospel ? (7) does the actual question of receiving Gentiles as such into the Church arise before ch. 10, the case of Cornelius ?

FOURTH STEP: OBSERVATIONS.

1. A great crisis in the career of the Church is brought about by the combined and violent hostility of the entire Jewish nation.

2. Saul rises to prominence as a leader among the most zealous and cruel of the persecutors. He becomes thus early in the narrative the chief figure in Primitive Church history.

3. During the preceding years the organized Christian Church had assumed a stable and definite character ; the dispersion which now comes is providentially the means of spreading organized Christianity throughout Palestine.

4. Philip became one of the most earnest and successful workers in introducing the Gospel everywhere ; he received either now or later the title of Evangelist, and that office may have arisen at this time.

5. Among Philip's converts in Samaria was one Simon, a sorcerer, who desired admission to Christian fellowship for its commercial, rather than its spiritual, value.

6. The apostles remained at Jerusalem, keeping up communication with the dispersed Christians, and maintaining authority over all the activities of the Church.

7. A deputation was sent by them to inspect the work done by Philip in Samaria, to approve and affiliate the new converts, and to communicate to them the peculiar blessings and power of the Holy Spirit.

8. By this recognition and adoption of the Samaritan Christians, the Church took another long and significant step toward universalizing the Gospel.

9. The Holy Spirit was with the Christians in their work, to direct them and give them wisdom.

10. The Ethiopian official, probably a devout Jew, was divinely guided into a knowledge of the truth concerning Christ, and was received into Christian fellowship by Philip.

11. Philip made an evangelizing tour northward along the west coast of Palestine, till he reached Cæsarea, which later became his home.

FIFTH STEP: SUMMARY.

1. Discuss Saul and his relation to the Church at this time.
2. Describe the effects of this persecution and dispersion upon the Christian Church.
3. State what advance was made by the Church, under these trying experiences, toward a universal and spiritual conception and realization of the Gospel.
4. Gather and classify the information afforded by this Section concerning :
 - (1) the duties and activities of the apostles.
 - (2) the evangelizing efforts of the Christians.
 - (3) the spread of organized Christianity.
 - (4) the character and work of Saul.
 - (5) miracle-working in the Primitive Church.
 - (6) the attitude of the Samaritans toward the Gospel.
 - (7) prayer as used by the Christians.
 - (8) two kinds of baptism, general and special.
 - (9) Jewish and Christian conceptions of the Messianic prophecies.

SIXTH STEP: TEACHINGS.

1. God in his providence makes all things work together for good to the upbuilding of his kingdom.
2. Religious persecution in its grosser form has passed away ; in its refined form it still prevails.
3. To be a Christian is something more and other than being numbered among the members of the Church, Matt. 7:21.
4. Any commercial traffic in sacred things is simony, and there is much of it still practised. It is a sin and reproach to the Church of Christ.
5. There is joy, guidance, wisdom, success for those who are faithful in Christian service.
6. Reading the Scriptures is not enough—they must be understood, and an understanding will be gained only by earnest search and a docile spirit toward those fitted to teach concerning them.

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STUDY XIII.

SEC. 11. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL FROM JUDAISM TO CHRISTIANITY.

Acts 9:1-19a; cf. 22:4-16; 26:9-18.

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DAMASCUS AND VICINITY.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.—(1) Cambridge Bible on Acts, pp. 108-116, also on the parallel passages, in loc. (2) Gloag's Comty. on Acts, I:313-330, etc. (3) Meyer's Comty. on Acts, pp. 181-190, etc. (4) Neander's Planting and Training of the Christian Church, I:77-90; II:88-94. (5) Bible Dictionary, arts. Ananias, Damascus, Paul. [(6) Vaughan's Church of the First Days, pp. 191-201.] [(7) Peloubet's Notes, 1892, in loc.] [(8) S. S. Times, Mar. 31, 1883.] (9) Schaff's History of the Christian Church, I:281-316. [(10) Fisher's Essays on the Supernatural Origin of Christianity, pp. 459-470; Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief, pp. 306-313.] (11) Stalker's Life of Paul, pp. 11-42. [(12) Farrar's Life of Paul, pp. 95-115.] (13) Conybeare and Howson's Life of Paul, pp. 66-79; also pp. 1-62 preliminary. [(14) Baur's Life of Paul, I:61-89.] [(15) Weiss's Introduction to the New Testament, I:149-161.] (16) Encyclopedia Britannica, 9th ed., art. Paul, by Dr. Edw. Hatch; and art. Paul, by Prof. M. B. Riddle, in the Amer. Supplement to the Encyc. Brit. (17) There are many general works on Paul and Paulinism, of the highest value: Prof. Geo. B. Steven's Pauline Theology, Matheson's Spiritual Development of St. Paul, Sabatier's The Apostle Paul, Pfeleiderer's Urchristenthum, Weizsäcker's Die Apostolische Zeitalter, and others. These all treat of the Conversion, but will otherwise be of more service in the later study of the Epistles.

FIRST STEP: FACTS.

1. The basis of this study is ch. 9:1-19a; let the verse synopses of this passage be worked out as usual. The paragraph divisions of this material, with their respective headings, are:

PAR. 1. *Vv.* 1-2, PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA.

PAR. 2. *Vv.* 3-9, THE REVELATION OF JESUS TO SAUL.

PAR. 3. *Vv.* 10-19a, THE COMMISSION THROUGH ANANIAS.

2. Of the incidents attending the conversion of Saul, we have three distinct narratives: (1) Acts 9:1-19a. (2) Acts 22:4-16. (3) Acts 26:9-18. To arrive at the exact facts, therefore, it is necessary to make a careful comparative study of all three accounts. This the student is expected to do, working out of all three the harmonized details of the event, and noting the conjunctions and the divergences among the separate narratives. The most satisfactory method of producing such a harmony is to write out the three accounts in parallel columns (or cut them out and paste them so). Then the comparison of them will be practicable and very interesting.

[3. From the three different narratives thus brought into parallel relation, the student will write out a single harmonized narrative, which shall combine the details of all three in their proper consecution. Let each item of the account be marked as to which narrative or narratives it is drawn from—(1) (2) (3), and where the different narratives conflict let the conflicting detail be inserted in parenthesis in the proper place. Such a harmony will require time and pains, but it is well worth the doing.]

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SECOND STEP: EXPLANATIONS.

PAR. 1. *v.* 1, (a) "but"—explain connection. (b) "yet"—explain relation to Acts 8:3. (c) "breathing"—what is the figure? [(d) "slaughter"—had other Christians than Stephen been put to death?] (e) who was high priest at this time? (f) why apply to him for letters from the Sanhedrin? *v.* 2, (a) what prompted this movement on Saul's part? (b) why was the commission given to *him*? (c) "the Way"—explain, cf. Acts 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22; also 16:17; 18:25. (d) "women"—notice their prominence in the Christian community.

PAR. 2. *v.* 3, (a) "journeyed"—how far was Damascus from Jerusalem? [(b) indicate on the map the route he probably took, and imagine as you may the details of the journey.] (c) "light . . . heaven"—cf. Ex. 33:9; Psa. 99:7; Deut. 4:11; Matt. 17:2; Jno. 8:12. *v.* 4, (a) "persecutest"—cf. Acts 26:4; Isa. 63:9; Zech. 2:8; Lk. 10:16. (b) "me"—whom? *vv.* 5f, (a) "Jesus"—further designation in Acts 22:10. (b) cf. AV, noting and explaining omission of 5b, 6a. (c) "must do"—cf. Acts 22:10, and explain. *vv.* 7f, (a) "speechless"—why? (b) "hearing . . . voice"—cf. marg. rdg. and Acts 22:9; did the men understand what was said? (c) cf. 1 Kgs. 19:12; Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Jno. 12:28. (d) "beholding"—did any one besides Saul receive the revelation of Jesus; if not, why not? (e) "they led him"—who did? *v.* 9, (a) these facts recorded only in this account. (b) compare the experience of Christ in the wilderness temptation. [(c) is this entire event the one referred to in 2 Cor. 12:1-4?] [(d) explain the meaning of Gal. 1:16.]

PAR. 3. *v.* 10, (a) "disciple"—explain. (b) "Ananias"—is anything more known concerning him? [(c) "Lord"—God, or Jesus, cf. Acts 9:17.] (d) "vision"—what was the nature of this communication? (e) "behold"—cf. 1 Sam. 3:1-10; Gen. 22:1. *v.* 11, (a) "arise and go"—cf. Acts 8:26. [(b) "street . . . Straight"—can it now be located in the city?] (c) "inquire . . . Judas"—Saul was still with his Pharisaic associates. (d) "one . . . Saul"—with whom the Damascus Christians were acquainted only by his reputation. (e) "prayeth"—what relation had this to Ananias's visit? *v.* 12, (a) "he hath seen"—cf. AV, a divine communication to Saul also. [(b) "laying . . . hands"—commonness and significance of this custom.] (c) "sight"—now providentially obscured. *v.* 13, (a) "heard . . . many"—Saul was a notorious persecutor, feared by the Christians. (b) "evil"—what and how? (c) "saints"—is this its first use as applied to Christians? (d) what does it mean and signify? (e) does it refer to a prescribed standard, or to a realized one, cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:2; 11:21; et al.? *v.* 14, [(a) "here . . . authority"—how had the Christians learned of Saul's errand to Damascus?] (b) "chief priests"—cf. Acts 9:1f. (c) "call . . . name"—explain. *v.* 15, [(a) "go . . . for"—the reason is given to the hesitating disciple.] (b) "chosen vessel"—cf. marg. rdg., also Rom. 9:21ff, and state meaning. (c) "bear my name"—explain. (d) "Gentiles . . . kings . . . Israel"—is there a significance in this order? (e) give instances in which Saul afterward did these things. *v.* 16, [(a) "I will show"—reveal to him now, or in the course of his career cause him to learn?] (b) cf. 2 Cor. 6:4f; 11:23-28; Phil. 1:12; et al. *v.* 17, (a) consider Ananias's obedience. (b) "brother"—what did this mean, and why was it used by Ananias? (c) what was the two-fold ministry of Ananias to Saul? *v.* 18, (a) "fell . . . scales"—actually or only seemingly so? [(b) consider whether

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his "thorn in the flesh" was a weakness of the eyes, perhaps due to, and serving as a constant reminder of, this critical experience.] (c) "baptized"—into his new life and work? *v.* 19a, "strengthened"—physically or spiritually?

THIRD STEP: TOPICS.

1. The Three Distinct Accounts. (1) who is the narrator of the account in ch. 9, and what was his source of the history? (2) who is the narrator of the accounts in chs. 22 and 26, and how were the reported addresses obtained? (3) which one of the three accounts seems to be the most precise and trustworthy in historic detail? [(4) explain and if possible justify the freedom of narration which Paul has allowed himself in his two accounts.] (5) consider, and harmonize or explain, the five most obvious and important divergences between the three accounts: (a) two questions by Saul, or only one; (b) Jesus's words, "it is hard for thee," etc.; (c) relation of Saul's companions to the phenomena; (d) commission given by Ananias or by Jesus; (e) three days' blindness and fasting. [(16) what do these striking variations suggest as to the manner in which minor historic details were regarded by the early Christian teachers and writers?] [(7) how do such confictions in the narrative affect the trustworthiness of the history?] [(8) what bearing do they have upon a theory of so-called verbal inspiration?]

2. The Mission to Damascus. (1) locate Damascus on the map, [and give a general description of the city as it was in the Apostolic time.] (2) how came Christians to be there, and in what numbers? (3) to what territory was Damascus the gateway, that made it the particular point to be guarded by the Pharisaic persecutors? [(4) what was the number and character of the synagogues in Damascus?] (5) what relation did the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem sustain to these foreign synagogues? (6) what was the purport of the Sanhedric letters given Saul, and with what authority did they invest him? (7) what was the responsibility of the individual synagogue regarding the suppression of heresy among its members? (8) what, however, was to be done with the heretics in this instance? (9) why did the Sanhedrin prefer to conduct this prosecution of Christians itself?

3. Phenomena of the Revelation. (1) they were as follows: (a) vicinity of Damascus; (b) at midday; (c) a shekinah, (d) in which Jesus actually appeared to Saul; (e) stunning blindness; (f) a voice from heaven; (g) Jesus's question in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul," etc.; (h) Jesus's word, "It is hard," etc.; (i) Saul's question in reply, "Who art thou, Lord?" (j) Jesus's answer, "I am," etc.; (k) Saul's second question, "What wilt," etc.; (l) command to go into the city and receive his commission; (m) continued blindness; (n) three days' fast. [(2) why was it desirable that the revelation to Saul should have been attended by such striking circumstances?] (3) consider the shekinah and the voice from heaven, in their significance, and in their relation to former manifestations of a like kind in Jewish history. (4) what is the meaning of Jesus's saying, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad"? (5) what did Saul mean by his question, "Who art thou, Lord?" (6) what was the divine purpose of the blindness with which Saul was stricken? (7) what reason for the long fast?

4. Saul's Preparation for this Crisis. (1) is it prejudicial to the miraculous element involved in this event to understand that Saul was naturally and

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providentially prepared for it? (2) can the change be regarded as intelligible or explicable except upon the basis of a spiritual and psychological preparation? (3) is there anything to be gained by postulating no preparation on Saul's part? (4) distinguishing carefully between preparation and anticipation, is there anything in the account to indicate that there was no preparation? (5) what evidence that there *was* preparation? (6) consider six ways in which he was specially prepared for this revelation of Jesus: (a) by his natural temperament—humane, sincere, loyal to religious truth; (b) by birth and education—a Hellenistic Jew, trained in the liberal school of Gamaliel, and associated with Hellenists; (c) by his contact with Christian truth—in the Christian preaching, especially of Stephen, which as a deep thinker and a mentally trained man, he must have profoundly considered; (d) by his contact with the Christians themselves—witnessing their fine courage, joy, forgiveness, faith, traits nobler than his own religion produced; (e) by his own spiritual unrest—he had kept the law blamelessly, but was not at peace, cf. Rom. 7; (f) by his present inhuman inquisition—his religion had led him into brutal bloodshed and persecution, which he knew was ungodlike and wrong; he was therefore searching for the new right, especially during his long period of meditation upon his experiences as he journeyed to Damascus.

5. Two Uses of the Term "Conversion." (1) cf. the Century Dictionary, word Conversion, definitions 3 and 4. (2) the word is commonly used in religious discussion in both these senses: (a) to denote a change of will, a reversal of moral choice, a turning from sin to righteousness; (b) to denote a change of mind, a reversal of religious belief, consequent upon the gaining of new knowledge. (3) consider whether any change of will—of supreme purpose—is involved in the second form of conversion. (4) is it accurate to say that the first definition signifies a change of character, from bad to good; the second definition signifies a change of doctrine, for instance from Judaism to Christianity, involving of course the necessary adjustments thereto? (5) in which sense do we mean the word when we speak of the "conversion" of Saul?

6. The Substance of the Conversion of Saul. (1) what was Saul's character previous to his conversion, cf. Phil. 3:6; Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:13; Acts 26:9; Gal. 1:14; Jno. 16:2f? (2) was his essential character changed in the critical experience? (3) was his purpose to do God's will equally sincere both before and after conversion? (4) the one thing Saul lacked before conversion was the evidence which would convince him of the Messiahship of Jesus; give reasons why he lacked this; how far was he to blame for the lack? (5) was he as slow to believe as were the immediate disciples of Jesus? (6) did the miracle *cause*, or did it only *influence*, Saul's conversion? (7) show how, under the first definition of conversion, the miracle could not have *caused* it, as that would violate man's free agency. (8) show how, under the second definition, the miracle *did cause* the conversion, since it gave the knowledge which turned Saul from Judaism to Christianity. (9) state, then, exactly what was the substance of the conversion of Saul.

7. The Ministry of Ananias. (1) what was the purpose in having the commission delivered to Saul by a disciple Ananias? (2) consider the divine communications to both, in preparation for this meeting. [(3) compare the similar circumstance in the case of Peter and Cornelius, Acts 10:1-23.] (4) consider Ananias's timidity regarding Saul, and the divine removal

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of it. (5) was he by Ananias received into the Christian brotherhood? (6) consider Ananias's two-fold ministry to Saul. (7) consider that the Holy Spirit baptism was administered to Saul by a common disciple, instead of by the Apostles (cf. Acts 8:14-17). [(8) why was Saul to be called and commissioned entirely apart from the Twelve (Gal. 1:16f)?]

8. The Divine Commission to Paul. (1) compare this commission as recorded in the three different accounts (9:15ff; 22:14f; 26:16ff), noting and explaining the important variations. (2) was Saul's commission at the first a distinctive and exclusive appointment to the Gentile work, or did it come to be that afterward by force of circumstances, cf. Acts 9:22-25; 22:17-21; Gal. 1:16; Rom. 11:13; Eph. 3:8; Rom. 15:16; Gal. 2:2, 7ff; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11. [(3) why was the commission given so many years before the Gentile work fully began?] (4) what were Saul's particular qualifications for this work? [(5) why had no one of the original apostles been developed into fitness for this service, so that there had been no need to call in another to perform it?] (6) what differences were there between the work among Jews and that among Gentiles? (7) state how the conversion of Saul marks a great and significant advance toward the universalizing and spiritualizing of the Gospel, which is the main theme of the Acts history.

FOURTH STEP: OBSERVATIONS.

1. The persecution of the Christians was prosecuted even to Damascus, which was the gateway to the East, and through which Christianity might be carried to the dispersed Jews in that region.

2. The Sanhedrin at Jerusalem had authority over all foreign synagogues, and now purposed to have all Christians tried by itself.

3. In many natural and providential ways Saul had been prepared for the revelation of Jesus now accorded him.

4. The revelation was attended by many striking circumstances which would impress Saul and his companions with its supernaturalness and significance.

5. Saul had an actual physical vision of Jesus, before he was blinded by the light. 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8.

6. He was given days in which to meditate upon, and adjust himself to, his new experience.

7. He was left among his Pharisaic associates until in prayer he chose to join the Christians.

8. The only thing he had lacked was convincing evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, and this evidence was given him by the revelation.

9. His conversion was not a change of heart and purpose, but a change of belief and action; not from badness to goodness, but from Judaism to Christianity.

10. The revelation of Jesus to Saul *caused* his conversion.

11. The agency of Ananias served to affiliate Saul with the Damascus Christians.

12. Saul was a chosen servant of Providence for the spread of the Gospel, especially among the Gentiles.

13. He received the spirit baptism without the mediation of the Apostles.

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14. The variations of narration in the three accounts are many and important, but do not invalidate the main features of the history.

15. The conversion of Saul was a most important step toward a universal and spiritual conception and realization of Christianity.

FIFTH STEP: SUMMARY.

State fully and distinctly what you understand to have been the facts regarding the following items :

- (1) Saul's preparation for the revelation of Jesus which was accorded him.
- (2) the meaning of the word "conversion," as applied to Saul, with reasons therefor.
- (3) the occasion for this revelation to Saul, and its evidential value, as compared with Jesus's revelation of himself to his immediate disciples.
- (4) the specific commission given Saul at this time.
- (5) the providential aspect of this event, as regarded Saul, and also the Christian Church.

SIXTH STEP: TEACHINGS.

1. God provides that the person who wills to do his will shall know of the doctrine (Jno. 7 : 17), shall be informed as to what the divine will is.

2. The knowledge which Saul was given concerning Jesus's Messiahship was not so complete and convincing as that which any one may now find in the Bible.

3. Careful, prayerful meditation upon Christian truth and experience is the avenue to a right belief and a right life.

4. The agency of all disciples is used by Christ in the fulfillment of his purposes and the establishment of his kingdom.

5. The events of history, and the events of sincere men's lives, are ordered of God according to his wisdom, power and love.

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